

When It Rains

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Summary:

Even though they don't remember each other, they don't always forget either.

1. Richie

Richie is sixteen when he finally gets laid. He has Amy Newman in the backseat of his Buick 8 out by the sand dunes, his jeans and *Fruit of the Looms* around his knees. The tight, wet heat is better than anything he ever knew—better than the shit he's heard in the locker rooms; it's certainly better than what he was prepared for.

With all his trash talk throughout grade school, Richie never really fathomed just how good having his dick in a pussy would really feel. It's like a glove, only a soft, constricting glove. It's better than jerking off—better than the blow job he'd gotten in eighth grade, that's for sure.

And Amy is better than any hot nurse fantasy he's ever had—but only because she's an extension of the grasping pleasure. Sure, she's pretty enough—strawberry blonde hair, nice tits, great ass. But she's got an appetite for boys to put Dahmer to shame; he's just another one deflowered—a pity fuck really, although Richie knows that his habit of toking in the school parking lot, skipping classes and cussing out the vice principal is exciting to Amy.

She wouldn't have looked twice at a gangly, pale, long-haired guy like him if he hadn't amused her.

Richie wants to hold out, to show Amy that he's boss in bed—to make good on all the times he's boasted about doing this exact thing. But she's more experienced, he's not prepared and she does something with her fingers to his balls that has him coming with a pathetic whimper, his whole body jerking like the virgin that he is.

The air is ripe with the smell of skin and sweat and her. For one moment Richie lets himself feel the bliss; then the weight settles on him. He just flubbed this hard core—came within seconds of being inside her, and he's pretty sure she'll be laughing her ass off with her girlfriends the next day.

Amy smiles, allows him a kiss as he slides out, and says that she's never had an orgasm so hard. Richie resists rolling his eyes as he ties off the spunk-filled rubber and chuckles it out the window. Virgin he

may have been, but he knows full well that it takes a lot for chicks to come; it's almost insulting that Amy thinks he's so stupid.

"Gotta take a leak," he says, shuffling back into his pants as Amy sits up and adjusts her bra. She's already got a smoke between her fingers, and Richie assumes he'll be the talk of the girl's locker room before second period on Monday morning.

He hustles behind the nearest dune; the air is crisp and chilly. Richie is half way finished taking the mother of all pisses when some primitive human instinct tells him that his bladder isn't the only thing letting loose. He grimaces, shakes off, and is about to zip up when, without any preamble, the rain starts.

Richie glares at nothing in particular.

This is a fine kettle of fucking fish; not only did he just make a fool out of himself with Amy fucking Newman, but now Mother Nature is adding her two cents to the pot. Richie wouldn't be surprised if a shark washes up to shore and bites his dick off next, what with the lovely evening he's been having.

The breeze dances off the ocean; Richie pauses half way in the middle of zipping his fly.

There's something about the rain—the feel and smell of it—that brushes against some part of his mind. He feels a hidden vault open, a tide of emotion and memory washing over him so clearly and abruptly that it makes him feel like an electric shock has hit him. There's something wonderful in these memories—wonderful but also terrifying. He remembers being mortally afraid, remembers a desperate struggle against an almighty something or other; but there's a sense of completion, of wholeness; of security and, above all, love.

Without thinking, he looks at his palm, tracing the faint white scar running along it with a shaking finger. He's never quite remembered just how he got this scar; he's pretty sure it was some stupid prank of his own creation, or a scrap in his childhood. Now, with this warm, frightening shadow of a memory ghosting over his mind, he knows that it's meaningful, this scar—that it comes from something vital and important.

A car horn blares, shocking Richie from this cocoon.

"Come on, Richie, are you rubbing one out or something? I wanna go home!"

Amy.

Amy Newman, whining and already forgetting about the fact that she's forever going to be Richie "Trashmouth" Tozier's first.

Shaking his head, Richie zips his fly up and walks back to the Buick, already leaving behind the feeling that, at one point, he belonged somewhere.

2. Ben

See Ben; see Ben run; run Ben, run

No matter how many laps he's done, no matter how many hills he's crested or tracks he's beat down, Ben's mind never fails to play the dumb mnemonic. He guesses that it's some kind of hangover from childhood, not that he's keen on looking back to unearth that answer.

Childhood was unsatisfactory; childhood was imperfect; childhood was spent flabby and winded and ridiculed. Now, on the other side of seventeen, he's a young man—tall, broad shouldered, built and powerful as a lion in its domain.

Ben has been running since as long as he can remember. On days like this, when school is out and the clouds are gathering, Ben is once more beating the pavement into submission, showing it and all other obstacles, that he is master of his body and his life.

Even with the air crisp and chill with the rumor of October, Ben is shirtless; he hates sweating, hates how uncomfortable it is against his clothes. He's heard others at school, a few girls and a handful of guys, saying that Handsome Hanscom runs shirtless because he knows he's good looking. But Ben isn't that vain—isn't that full of himself. He's proud of his accomplishments, yes, but the lack of a shirt is both a preference and a practicality.

His headphones are thrumming with the rhythm of alt rock, carrying him through a workout that has already consumed the better part of forty-five minutes; his Walkman is clipped to the waistband of his shorts, the cassette already rewound and flipped twice.

Feel the burn, he thinks as he starts up the steep incline of Overlook Hill. *Feel the burn; keep breathing; run, Ben, run...*

His legs are only just starting to groan from the strain; a not altogether unpleasant cooling prickle courses through his lungs; he can hear his heart beat under the music blaring in his ears—can feel it against his chest.

Sweat drips from his head, soaking his exposed skin.

Something cool plops onto his nose; Ben blinks, and then feels another cold drop on the back of his neck...and then another.

The rain is already cascading over the street before he reaches the top of the hill. Ben's sweat is washed away, spiralling to the pavement and down the gutters; he's going to be freezing his nuts off by the time he gets home, but he supposes it's his own fault for going without a shirt today.

He stops at the top of the hill, hands braced on his knees, breathing heavily, taking great gulps of the rainy air into his lungs.

Between breaths, he feels something. It's not a thing that he can describe. All he knows is that it's a something—a filling of space that was vacant before; and the thing that has occupied this void makes Ben's spine turn to ice.

He looks over his shoulder, disoriented for a moment.

There's supposed to be more people here, he realizes—people who meant something to him. Why is he alone—why has he constantly been alone all throughout middle school and high school—when he knows he had people who meant the world to him? People who didn't care that he'd been chubby and slow and sluggish?

Ben thinks of red as he stares through the rain—thinks of a soft, glowing red like coals—like embers glowing in a hearth in the darkness of a cold January night.

Yes, there's something there. Only he can't grasp it. The more he searches, the more he realizes that there's darkness beyond this safe glow—darkness tied into the faint white scars on his hand and his chest.

He thinks of red again—a different kind of red, something bright and offensive, the kind of bloody scarlet that demands to be seen.

To be feared.

Ben's legs wobble as he turns away from the hill he just climbed. He

starts running again, uncontrolled at first—away from that memory... away from that fear.

See Ben; see Ben run; run, Ben run...

3. Bev

Nightmares had been the norm with her for so long that she'd wondered if she'd ever remember how to dream.

Now, with the lights and noise and beautiful chaos of New York City surrounding her, Bev is starting to think that there is something to the old adage of dreams coming true. She's somewhere, with a whole bunch of somebodies. She's young, enjoying life on the cusp of graduating from high school—enjoying freedom and choice and chance.

Yet for all this sense of wandering in some great dream, she never finds the need to let the sensation out. She's perfectly content to sit on the subway while the girls laugh and point and plan their next outing.

Bev likes to watch, likes to observe—likes to know where she is and what could happen. Even if she knows well and truly that she's not going to drop anchor here in New York City, at least she's here—not elsewhere, wherever that was.

The whole car smells like people—like skin and cologne and body odor. And it's not pleasant because Bev isn't stupid enough to romanticize the hard edges of The Big Apple; but goddamn it, it's somewhere, and she couldn't be happier to be here—to glance around the car at the different walks of life crammed onto the seats and against the walls.

She likes to imagine who they are and where they're all going based on their clothes alone—likes to think about what she could put on them to dress them up, or in the case of the ostentatious business people, dress them down.

Before long, the subway car hisses to a halt at the Forty-Second Street station. Her girlfriends grab Bev's wrist and she's whisked out of her seat in a haze of giggles and anticipation. There's a whole city to be explored, to be pecked to the bone, and they're all ravenous for it.

As she runs up the stairs, Bev can smell the distinctive musk of wet

concrete and pollution. It started raining sometime between this station and the last. The air hits her and her friends full blast, and the girls shriek at the unexpectedness of it.

In that moment, Bev has the sense that she's looking—well, not outward at herself—more as if she's seeing herself from the future watching herself now...and shaking her head.

When the hell did she get so fucking girly? She can't remember always being this way—in fact, she's certain that she wasn't like this at all. She used to roll in the dirt, to chuck rocks; to scrap and fight and cuss and run with the boys as one of the boys...

Bev stops once they reach the street level, feeling the rain against her skin. This late in spring, the rain usually falls warm and refreshing, sinking into the earth of Central Park and giving life to the trees planted along Fifth Avenue.

This rain is cold, wet and unrelenting—almost as if autumn has crept in through the cracks of springtime for one last reminder of its chilling power.

Bev's muscles tighten; she frowns, and stands to the side, looking in the bag flung over her shoulder. She rummages among make-up (*seriously, when did I get so goddamn girly, she thinks*) and napkins and sticks of gum, trying to find something, anything.

She's missing something, forgotten something important. The revelation steals on her, and it's as if she lost a child somewhere down in the bowels of the subway station. She needs to find what she's missed, needs to cradle it to her because it's meaningful and innocent and in need of guidance and nurturing. It's precious to her, this missing thing, and she can't believe that she ever forgot about it.

Before her friends are even aware of what's happening, Bev is hurrying back down the stairs, eyes peeled for this missing thing. Her mind flashes with snatches of memories—or are they dreams? Of rocks and lakes and more rain—of soft skin and lips and bashful blushes and poetry. Her hand skims along the railing, and she remembers the scar on her palm—the one that she's certain she got from her bastard of a father.

Only now, frantic to hang onto this missing something or other, Bev knows that this mark isn't from trauma—its exquisite, a token of this fleeting memory that has her hurtling through departing passengers towards the subway platform.

Yes, it's there—just on the other side of the turnstile. All she has to do is reach out and grip it like a balloon and—

Bev collides with cold metal steel.

Her friends are calling her, coming down the stairs behind her, wet and bedraggled and confused.

Bev stares almost beseechingly into the crowd of commuters; she can almost see what it is that she sought disappearing, vanishing... slipping away.

The doors of the subway car close; with another squeal and a hiss, the train moves on, taking that lost something with it.

4. Stan

People are screaming all around him; the floodlights are bright enough to blind even the most hardy of men. It's after eight, and cooling off now that the sun is down, and Stan doesn't know why he's here—only that he's having a good time. He's here with his friends, after all—his people, his study group, his fellow chemistry Olympians, and of course, his girlfriend.

"I'm betting twenty on the touchdown," Patty says, eyes fixed on the green field.

She's something of a unicorn, not only because she's beautiful and smart and popular—not just because she likes both science, video games and sports—but also because she's dating Stanley Uris and has been doing so since junior year of high school.

Stan understands Patty's affinity for the Cro Magnon world of footballs and soccer balls and other such balls. It's about statistics and analytics—logic, really, and Stan's world is nothing if not logical. Granted, someone as wonderful as Patty being willingly with someone like him is slightly *illogical*, but this is one of those things that Stan doesn't really see the need to explore.

Sometimes, things in the universe just *are*, and that's perfectly fine with him.

He huddles under the blanket draped around his and Patty's shoulders, watching as the coach lines the players back up. He's only been out of high school for a few months, and it already feels like he hasn't even left—least of all because Patty's been dragging him to every football game at their recent alma mater since the season started.

Stan watches, knowing what will happen when the team breaks their huddle, secure in the sense of it. Sports tactics, after all, are part of a plan—part of a way of doing things, of carrying out organized tasks.

And what is also part of the plan is the human need to feed.

His stomach growls, audible enough even under the peppy voices of the cheerleaders, that it makes Patty and everyone in a five-foot radius turn and stare. Stan feels himself go red to the roots of his hair. He shrugs the blanket off, and says quietly to Patty, “Gonna grab some onion rings. You want anything?”

“That’s okay, baby. I ate before we left...which is also what I told you to do.”

“You also told me that we’d be late if I stopped at the *In-And-Out*.” Stan sticks his tongue out and then clammers around the crowd and down the steps. The wind is picking up, and he wishes he’d remembered to dress a little warmer. Then again, just being near Patty has a way of warming him up.

He grabs a greasy bag of onion rings from the vendor, and leans against the stand, chowing down. Cheers and whistles sound from the stands; the bleachers shake. Anticipation and excitement, the very essence of sports...all as it should be.

Stan crumples the paper box and tosses it into the nearest wastebasket. He pumps the air in victory when he gets it one shot and then makes to go back up the bleachers.

The rain starts softly at first, almost imperceptibly, but Stan feels it long before the people on the bleachers do. It’s a fine, misty drizzle, barely cold enough to make the skin crawl.

Stan feels the world tilt on its axis; order goes out the window. He’s got one hand on the smooth, cold steel of the bleacher railings, can see Patty’s pretty face and the glint of her glasses from here. Yet he feels an all-encompassing dread—a terror so profound that it makes his guts curdle.

He doesn’t know where it comes from, only that it’s stealing the air from his lungs. He can’t be here, can’t be out in the open—he has to get away, has to hide, but from what he doesn’t know.

It’s ludicrous, and even before he’s made it to the shelter of the space beneath the bleachers he’s already shaking the dread off. It’s just a panic attack, he tells himself, brought on by the suddenness of the

rain and the stress of being in college...

But why does it feel like I'm going to cry? He thinks as he walks into the darkness under the bleachers. *God, why do I want to cry? It's just fear; just a response.*

Deep down, in the part of him that isn't altogether logical, Stan knows that it isn't the sudden downpour, or the prospect of being an adult. There's something there, something distant and calling—something like the memory of a nightmare.

It brings him to his knees. He sinks into the saddening earth, staring through the slats and hundreds of legs; he can't see the game, can't hear the blow-by-blow, or the cheerleaders, or anything. All he can think about is the fear, the terror that there's something in his past coming to get him.

He wipes his eyes on his hand, and finds himself staring at white scar in the middle of his palm, only just visible beyond his lifelines and wrinkled skin.

I did this, he thinks. I made us do this.

He doesn't know who the *us* is—only that he misses them terribly, and that he feels so deeply ashamed that they're not here anymore. He needs their lights to shine, to guide him through this thick fog of oppressive amnesia—to pull him away from this fear. Only try as he might, they dance away from him, like will-o-wisps. All he can remember is laughter and belonging and love and—

Stan sobs, a pathetic, hiccuping sound lost under a tumult of cheers and stamping feet as the home team scores a touchdown.

Love.

They loved him, and he loved them and now they're gone and all that's left is this choking fear, and Christ he can't face it, God he just wants to die right now...

Patty finds him after the game, a sobbing, shaking mess under the bleachers, face streaked with tears and snot running from his nose.

“Stan—oh, baby, what’s wrong?”

Stan shakes his head, staring at the darkness in front of him.

He says it over and over again, mind blank, having forgotten what drove him here in the first place—having abandoned any and all reason: “I don’t know...I don’t know...”

5. Eddie

He likes to go for drives when boredom sinks its claws in. On these drives, behind the wheel of his '58 Plymouth Fury, he doesn't have to think—doesn't have to worry about anything. He just has to concentrate on the road, on the movement of the wheel and the subtle shift of gears and gas mileage.

Eddie isn't surprised that he never did a thing after high school, aside from getting this car and moving out from under his mother's thumb. It wasn't that college didn't appeal to him—only that he didn't understand the necessity of it.

And fear.

There isn't enough highway in the good old U. S of A that could help him out-think the fact that he was afraid to move on—to try something that held the potential to change his life. Change is frightening, and Eddie hasn't changed much, at least as far as he can remember.

He's stagnant in his own life, rooming with people his own age and hating them secretly for leaving dirty dishes in the sink—for simply breathing around him when he just wants to be left the fuck alone.

That's why he drives—to have the illusion of mobility.

Today is just another day towards the end of September; all the other twenty-somethings are going to school, burying their noses in books for the sake of Bachelor's degree that'll get them nowhere; and Eddie Kaspbrak is driving down a lonely stretch of highway with the sounds of George Harrison filling the car.

“What is my life without your love...what is my life...”

What is his life—what happened to his life? He always thought something would change—that someone would come along with a steady hand and tell him where to go—how to graduate from this stage of aimless adulthood to the next.

The words “pathetic” and “weak” cross his mind; he’s sure as he is of his own nutsack that someone applied those words to him in his life, but Eddie is also damn sure that he’d have to have existed for even those monikers to apply to him. He’s practically invisible—just a driver on a road leading nowhere.

Rain begins to plop onto his windshield. Eddie shakes his head ruefully; of course it’s raining now. The day is turning into the most egregious stereotype of a blues song in the world; he’s certain that if he had a dog it’d probably end up hit by a car, just to complete the Nina Simone-eqsue daguerreotype of his life at the moment.

Something dark scurries across the road. It’s a rabbit; Eddie slams on his brakes, but the frightened little creature is too overcome by panic to dart out of the way. For one lingering moment their eyes meet, and Eddie sees something familiar in that wide-eyed, terrified look.

Then there’s a sickening crunch and the rabbit disappears under the wheels of the Plymouth.

Eddie’s car jerks to a stop, rain pattering on the roof in a steady rhythm; each bullet-like plop drills a horrible guilt into Eddie’s mind. He just ran over a defenseless little creature, and he wants to tear his own heart out over it.

He thinks that maybe it can be saved—maybe it’s just stuck; maybe he only crushed its little leg.

Grasping onto the thought, Eddie climbs out of the car.

The rain is cold and unrelenting, brutal and hard and frigid. There’s a stiff wind blowing, bringing with it the stinging promise of what is going to be a long and brutal winter.

Eddie is half-way around the hood of his Plymouth, his mind painting a lurid picture of the little bunny rabbit in a tiny, little bunny rabbit cast, like the one he wore when—

He stops, blinking, confused, letting the cold rain soak through his sweater.

When did he wear a cast?

His frown deepens.

He's certain that he did, can picture it clear as the nose on his face. It was on his arm, and someone had scribbled an insulting word onto it. Loner? Liar?

Loser.

But that's not right either, because as he grasps at this sudden memory, Eddie can also see the cast with a thoughtful "V" drawn over the "S".

Lover.

Yes.

He's breathing faster now, letting the cold pierce his skin as he stares at his mullioned reflection in the windshield of his car.

There was a time when he wasn't alone; there was a time when he was doing something with his life, something wonderful and glorious. There was a time when people loved him more deeply than he thought it was possible to be loved. But who are these people, and why has he forgotten them?

Come back, he thinks desperately, his body shaking. *Come back, oh God, please come back and save me...*

His chest hurts; his lungs are on fire; his throat is tightening. He can't breathe, can't think. He needs these people, these people who cared about him, to be here, to calm him down.

Shaking, Eddie runs his hand over his rain-soaked face, his eyes catching on a scar on his palm.

Where did that come from?

Where is he going?

Why aren't they here? Why aren't they helping him they way that they used to?

Eddie closes his eyes, demanding his mind to focus, but there's nothing but the blind panic—nothing but the constricting feeling of his chest on fire and his body burning. He's terrified, suffocating, he's lost and—

Lights blind him even from behind his closed lids.

There's a car coming down the back road, headlights bright. The driver slows, looking out the window in friendly concern—but that's not who Eddie wants to see, he's sure of it. He wants to see someone familiar, but who does he know besides his god awful roommates and his mother?

Eddie waves a trembling hand at the passerby; he's fine, after all—just some roadkill under his tires.

The car moves on; the rain keeps falling.

His limbs like lead, Eddie climbs back into the front seat of his car. He guns the engine again, letting the heater run. As warmth seeps through him, the sense of memory dissipates; but still, Eddie knows that he'll forget again once he drives away, and that sense of once belonging to people—of once being so deeply loved—was too comforting for him to want to forget about.

He can't stay here; can't stay still.

They—whatever they were—would want him to move on.

So Eddie shifts gears, grinds his tire into the dead rabbit's remains, and moves on down the road.

He wonders if he'll ever stop driving.

6. Bill

It starts with a rainstorm.

This inspiring phrase comes to Bill, as most things that inspire him to write do, at a most inopportune time: he's on the can in the bathroom of the Hilton Seattle Bellevue at his first ever writer's conference. Seeing as he can't just grab a piece of toilet paper and scribble down the words, he keeps the phrase running in his head as he finishes up, washes his hands and walks back to the conference hall.

It starts with a rainstorm...

Yes, that's a perfect way to kick off his next work. Only Bill can't string the phrase to anything else—can't find a satisfactory way to keep it going. Sure, the thing will start with a rainstorm—he's already thinking it'll be the mother of all rainstorms, a positive Noah's flood of water falling from the heavens; where it's falling and who it's falling on are as much of an enigma as when he'll get time to sit down and really think.

It's unfair that the hall is teeming with authors both established and up-and-coming. Sure, Bill's first book is already the toast of the genre fiction side, not least of which is because, at twenty-three, he's been crowned the "Boy King of Horror." But as his editor and agent and the bloodsucking publisher are all so fond of reminding him, an author's career isn't about a single title, it's about a body of work.

It starts with a rainstorm...

Bill walks through the crowded hall, waving at friends, acquaintances and those established authors who have been his heroes since his teens. He can't stop, can't feel awestruck or hero-worshipping because this goddamn phrase is doing a number on him.

It's hot in the hall, sticky and practically airless. He needs to get out and go for a walk—all writers worth their salt can speak to the benefit of a good stretch of the legs to work the kinks out of an idea. His guest handler is going to be pissed, but Bill doesn't have the patience to find the wretched man and tell him where he's going—it's

bad enough in all good consciousness that Bill can scarcely go to the john without giving the handler a head's up.

So he leaves the hall, takes the elevator to the ground floor and practically falls out the double doors. The concierge gives him a look of surprise, but Bill could hardly care.

It's a beautiful summer day, with thick fleecy white clouds in the sky. There's a bit of a chill in the air, but it's nothing a good walk can't stave off.

It starts with a rainstorm...

And then what? Bill thinks. *Come on, Billy boy, get your head in the game.*

He walks five blocks and down another two, past the train tracks and towards Spiritridge Park; still there is no consolatory rejoinder to this vexing problem.

A thick mass of white and blue clouds moves across the mellow yellow orb of the sun. Bill scarcely notices the subtle change in the weather, too consumed by this need to figure out just what in the name of all creation comes next.

It starts with a rainstorm...

Nothing.

Shit and Shinola, Bill fumes to himself. Then he frowns and stares at nothing in particular. Shit and Shinola? What is he, an eighty-year-old woman? Shinola was before his time—way before his time, so why--

It starts with a rainstorm...

And then, as if teasing him, as though promoted by his thoughts, it does start to rain. It's a sudden summer downpour, the kind that'll move on in a matter of fifteen minutes.

Bill Denbrough, shortlist winner for a Bram Stoker Award for Best Debut Horror Novel, stands and stares at the street separating him

from Spiritridge Park. He knows how gormless he must look, standing there with no umbrella and a thousand yard stare.

It can't be helped.

His eye is caught by the sluicing current running down the gutter and into the sewer grate, carrying twigs and gum wrappers and Bill's own rational mind with it.

It starts with a rainstorm...and a scream; with a yellow poncho and blood and cold terror; it starts with an empty chasm torn through the Denbrough family; it starts with an end, with an innocent, playful life snuffed out and exposed to a suffering too great for one so young; it starts with his baby brother—because Bill remembers that he had a baby brother: little Georgie, who idolized him and loved him—it starts with Georgie being taken away and screaming; it starts with the rain and with tears and nightmares and a thirst for revenge. It starts with George Denbrough and ends with Bill and others, others who helped him, who braved fear and monstrosity in aid of his quest. There are others, but Bill can't remember them, only that they were there and that they cared so much about each other, so fucking much...

He has to be romanticizing this, has to be twisting a past that is painful enough with Georgie being murdered of all things: Bill is a writer, and as such he can romanticize the act of taking a dump if he really puts his mind to it. But he knows that this isn't a figment of his own creative mind; this is real, this was his life once upon a time, and it's spiraling down the cold, rusted grate of the city sewer.

Something white as bone nudges against his shoe; Bill looks down and sees a paper boat. His breath catches in his throat; he feels mortally terrified, almost on the verge of pissing himself.

"Sorry mister!" A chipper voices makes Bill look round; a little figure in a plastic poncho is splashing through the puddles towards him.

Georgie, Bill's mind screams. Georgie, Georgie, Georgie!

Only it isn't Georgie for several good reasons: one, because Georgie was wearing yellow when he went out into the rain and this child is

wearing blue; secondly, this brave little soul running through the rain is a girl with black skin and shining brown eyes. And lastly, Georgie is dead, and has been for years.

The little girl stoops and grabs her paper boat. Then she sees that Bill isn't dressed for the weather and she scowls.

"You're going to catch a cold," she says wisely. "I'm never allowed to go out without a slicker on when it's like this. Mama won't let me, and the babysitter sure as hell won't." The girl's eyes go wide and she covers her lips with her hand. "Aw geez, please don't tell anyone that I swore!"

Bill grins. "Nuh-not guh-going to." Why is he stammering? Is he really that cold?

The girl gestures with her paper vessel. "She made it," she says conspiratorially. "It's sealed with wax. That's why it floats. Hey mister, do you think we'd all float if we had wax on us?"

"We all fuh-float here," Bill says almost wistfully.

The girl nods, as if she understands Bill's words when he himself can't.

"Kyra! Kyra did you find it?"

A young woman hurries towards the girl and Bill; she's wise enough to be holding a transparent umbrella, but Bill can't help but think she'd be beautiful even soaking wet. Her hair is dark as chestnuts, her skin smooth and flawless; there's warmth in her eyes, and the relief on her face when the child shows her the little paper boat suggests that she's not one of those overbearing types when it comes to children.

"Thank God," the woman mutters. She's at least three years younger than Bill; as Bill watches her, he finds himself thinking less about the rain and his brother and more about how he'd describe the woman if he had to write about her.

The little girl says, "This man stopped the boat from floating away."

The woman gives Bill a grateful look. "You saved me a temper tantrum."

"Nuh-nuh-no prob-luh-lem."

"He's cold," Kyra says in a stage whisper. "That's why he sounds like Porky Pig, right?"

"Out of the mouths of babes," the woman says by way of apology.
"Thanks again, Mister?--

Bill swallows down his sudden stammer and holds wet, cold hand out. "Denbrough. Bill Denbrough."

The woman gasps, nearly dropping her umbrella.

"Oh my god! The author? Seriously? I knew you were in Seattle for the convention but I didn't think you'd be out—well--

"Getting soaked to the bone?" Bill smiles. "Let's just say I needed some inspiration." Struck by a sudden bravery he says, "The convention is still in full swing if you two lovely ladies want to get out of the rain."

The babysitter gives him an apologetic smile. "Thanks, but I have to take Kyra home." She dances on the spot and adds, "But if you wanted to get coffee later? Say around three? There's a cozy place near the hotel..."

"Love to."

The woman smiles; Bill realizes that they've been shaking hands this whole time.

The woman's runs her finger along the scar on Bill's palm.

"Where'd you get this?" She asks curiously.

Bill shrugs as he lets go. "I've been wondering that myself for the longest time." He nods his goodbye to Kyra and starts to walk away, head bowed against the rain.

Then, remembering that there's a vital piece of information he's

missing, he turns back.

"What's your name?"

The nanny turns back, her smile all but bringing the sun out.

"Audra."

Bill nods.

It starts with a rainstorm, and it ends, Bill realizes as he walks back to the hotel, with a love story. Sometimes that's all that's needed in the best of tales.

7. Mike

He doesn't go out in the rain, not anymore. That's not to say that Mike is averse to the reliable showers that hammer the East Coast—it's only that there's something about the rain that drives him to places deeper and darker than the average rainy day blues. In any event, he prefers the coziness of sitting in the hall of records, warm as toast and in his sweats, to being out in the downpours and sprinkles that pass through Derry.

The hall has become Mike's fortress of solitude—a place to hide from the stubborn unchanging indolence of Derry—a refuge from the looks and muttered barbs that always sink into his skin. He knows he could leave any time he wants to—knows that there's a way out of this place with its weight of memory and the spectrum of intolerance.

He reads in the hall; takes coffee and tea and liquor in the hall; sometimes he sleeps there, other times he just wanders and thinks: *there's something I'm missing.*

It's his task to curate the history of the town—to comb through newspaper clippings and have lunch with the old fogies, because nobody else in Derry will, and as boring as the town is, it didn't ask to be built; it didn't ask to be so goddamn wet and backwards and sleepy.

Mike has to do it because Derry is one sedative away from falling into a coma and ceasing to exist. People live here; even if they aren't always good people, they deserve to be remembered.

Sometimes—usually when the rain pours down—Mike gets the impression that he himself is trying to remember something: that his endless days and sleepless nights of pouring through birth records and old newspaper clippings is due to gaps in his own sense of self. He never finds anything beyond what he chiefly knows: his name is Mike Hanlon, he's twenty-five years old; he's single. The rest may as well be Swiss cheese for how well he can recall it. Even when he looks at class pictures of himself, he finds the act makes him restless and bored. What does it matter who he went to school with in Derry when half the elementary school is either missing, dead or moved

away?

He starts journaling again, hoping that in combing the acts of the day he'll find clues to the past. It's really a game of inches; as easy as it is to write down his thoughts and musings, he never gets a full picture. Not unless it's raining.

On those days, Mike writes like his life depends on it, feeling the scar on his palm start to burn.

And slowly, like a blossoming flower, the memory returns to him. It's all fragmented at first, but becomes more complete. Mike still can't name what's there, still can't recall full faces or events, but he can remember the feeling—remember the terror and, more importantly, the love.

If Derry is asleep, then what he's trying to recall is the monster lurking on the fringes of the town's dream. Mike remembers it being something beyond Hell—something that feasted on terror and children. He can feel his fear return, and yet, there's always something that bolsters him—no, not something, somebody.

A lot of somebodies.

Going over his entries is an act of self-reflection—Mike realizes he's more of a nostalgic softie than he likes to let on. These rainy day journals are filled with a longing—a need; like a child begging for an old blanket. More than once Mike finds himself tearing up because that sense is lost and it may never come back again.

The names start to float through his mind: Bill, Eddie, Bev, Ben, Stan and Richie.

The Loser's Club.

His friends.

His blood brothers and blood sister.

He aches for them, and on the days and nights when the rain is at its mightiest, Mike does nothing but write about them—every little detail that he can remember. Even as his heart hurts at their absence,

something warm and blossoming in him—the Hope at the bottom of Pandora's Box—refuses to let him give into melancholy.

In anticipation, there is both dread and hope. Even as he moves on with his life, still dutifully taking records of every cat stuck up a tree in Derry, Mike never fails to write on those rain-soaked days.

Never forgets that he's waiting for those someone's to return to Derry.

To return to him.

Notes for the Chapter:

Let me know what you think!